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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of Reading Recovery, a preventative one-on-one tutoring program that targets first-grade students whose reading skills place them in the lowest 10-20% at their school. First implemented in the United States in 1986, by 1995-96, the program was being used by over 9,000 schools in 2,940 districts. Key components of the program include: diagnostic survey, tutoring sessions, teacher training, rereading of books introduced in previous lessons, independent reading of the preceding lesson's books while the teacher records errors, learning about letters, learning about sounds and how words work and are written, writing a story, and introducing and reading new books. Students receive 30 minutes of daily one-on-one tutoring by a specially trained, certified classroom teacher. Reading Recovery is supplemental to classroom instruction and lasts an average of 12-20 weeks. Students conclude the program when they can read at a level comparable to the average at that school and know how to use reading strategies. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (Contains 15 references.) (SR)

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Reading Recovery

Background - **Philosophy and Goals** - **Program Components** - **Evidence of Effectiveness**
Professional Development and Support - **Implementation** - **Costs** - **Considerations**
Policy Issues and Questions - **Resources**

Topic or Category: Reading Recovery
Grade Level: Early elementary
Target Population: At-risk

OVERVIEW

Background and Scope:

Reading Recovery is a preventative one-on-one tutoring program developed by Marie Clay, a New Zealand child psychologist. The program targets first-grade students whose reading skills place them in the lowest 10 to 20% at their school. Reading Recovery was first implemented in the United states in 1985. By 1995-96, Reading Recovery was being used by over 9,000 schools in 2,940 districts.

Philosophy and Goals:

Reading Recovery is based on the philosophy of accelerated learning and is designed to help students make faster than average progress so they can catch up with peers on reading achievement. The program goals are for students to read at a level equal to the school's average reading level and to teach students reading strategies that will encourage further improvement in their reading ability (Bracey, 1995). Through Reading Recovery, students build their basic reading skills, learn to monitor their own reading, develop good reading habits (such as rereading unclear words) and develop an understanding of how to gain meaning from text (Adams, 1990).

Program Components:

The key components of Reading Recovery include:
Diagnostic survey
Tutoring sessions
Teacher training
Rereading of books introduced in previous lessons
Independent reading of the preceding lesson's books while the teacher records errors
Learning about letters
Learning about sounds and how words work and are written
Writing a story
Introducing and reading new books.

Students receive 30 minutes of daily one-on-one tutoring by a specially trained, certified classroom teacher. Reading Recovery is supplemental to classroom instruction and lasts an average of 12-20 weeks. Students conclude the program when they can read at a level comparable to the average reading level at the school, meaning that they can read at a certain grade level and know how to use reading strategies (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998). A diagnostic survey is used to assess students' reading skill level and to monitor their progress throughout the program.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Summary of evidence:
Reading Recovery, an intensive, highly-structured tutoring program for first-grade students has a reputation of producing strong, quantifiable reading gains (Herman & Stringfield, 1997). Beyond reading improvement, research has shown that the program reduces the incidence of grade retention, remedial programs and special education placement. Some studies, however, indicate mixed achievement results among Reading Recovery participants.

Discussion of evidence:
Impact on student results:
Evaluations of Student Achievement:
In comparing results from several Reading Recovery studies, Shanahan and Barr (1995) concluded that: 1) children instructed with Reading Recovery are brought up to similar reading levels as their average-achieving peers; the program does not work for all children, but those who respond to Reading Recovery leave the program with "well-developed reading strategies, including phonemic awareness and knowledge of spelling;" 2) Reading Recovery students learned as much or more than other similar students who did not receive special instruction or Title I instruction; 3) following Reading Recovery instruction, students progress at somewhat lower rates than the average of their class, which might indicate a discrepancy between Reading Recovery and regular classroom instruction and a need for ongoing support beyond Reading Recovery during first grade.

Hiebert (1994) reviewed the Reading Recovery research and found that proficiency levels for students from Reading Recovery programs differed on varying tasks when compared to non-Reading Recovery students. Reading Recovery students attained the average school level when asked to orally read text, but performed similar to other low-achieving students on comprehension and identifying unknown words. Hiebert also found that the effects of Reading Recovery were not maintained through the fourth grade.

Longitudinal studies comparing Reading Recovery to traditional Title I pull-out or in-class instruction find that Reading Recovery students outperformed controls on most measures (Huck and Pinnell, 1986; Pinnell, 1988). However, some children (10 to 30%) do not benefit from the program, some would probably learn to read without special assistance and many who probably would succeed are not included in evaluations because of moves or high absenteeism. Some Reading Recovery students improved to the level of their class and above the level of the control group; however, those who did not grow out of the program (approximately 27%) remained below their class and substantially below the control group (DeFord Pinnell, Lyons & Young, 1988).

Iverson and Tunmer (1991) found that Reading Recovery improves reading skills compared to standard intervention and participating students do as well or better than classroom controls. They also discovered that Reading Recovery students who received explicit phonological processing guidance discontinued the program significantly earlier than Reading Recovery students without such help, but both groups performed similarly on end-of-year tests.

Approximately 75-85% of the lowest 20% of children served by Reading Recovery achieved reading and writing scores in the average range of their class and received no additional supplemental instruction (Pinnell, DeFord & Lyons, 1988; National Diffusion Network, 1993, as cited in Kentucky Department of Education, 1998; Swartz, Shook & Hoffman, 1993, as cited in Kentucky Department of Education, 1998).

Arkansas adopted the Reading Recovery program in 1988 for statewide use. From 1991 to 1994, 1,088 students received the full Reading Recovery program (defined as having 60 lessons). Among those students, 940 (or 86%) attained grade level. A follow-up study of 59 students who successfully completed the program was conducted for two years after their involvement with Reading Recovery. Compared to a random sample of non-Reading Recovery students, the Reading Recovery students performed at the same or higher levels on measures of dictation, spelling and text reading in both the third and forth grade. (TCER, 1997).

Long-term impact:
Although the evidence is somewhat ambiguous, Reading Recovery appears to have positive effects that last for several years after program participation (Wasik and Slavin 1993). Students who succeed with Reading Recovery continue to achieve better than control groups after the program, although growth of Reading Recovery students tends to be slower than average in second grade. Reading Recovery has been found to improve a student's chance of being promoted to second grade, but not third (DeFord et al. 1988; Lyons et al. 1989). Hiebert (1994) suggests that characteristics of inner city, low-income schools may contribute to a fade-out effect. Some researchers (Center et al., 1995) argue that Reading Recovery does not have a long-term impact because it does not stress enough phonological awareness skills.

Reading Recovery students are defined as those who either complete 60 lessons or are discontinued successfully. Those who leave the program with fewer than 60 lessons and have not been judged able to read on their grade level, such as students transferred to special education, are excluded from analysis in most studies. Therefore, results of Reading Recovery evaluations are potentially somewhat inflated (Herman & Stringfield, 1997).

Retention, Remediation and Special Education:
Reading Recovery has been found to be cost-effective when compared to remedial reading programs, special education placement and primary grade retention (Dyer, 1992; Swartz, 1992, as cited in Kentucky Department of Education, 1998).

A 1989 study in Wakeman, Ohio found that first-grade retention rates dropped from 24 to 1 in the three years of using Reading Recovery. Results from a study of nine schools in Lancaster, Ohio showed a significant reduction in first-grade retention rates and special education referrals.

A 1993 study by Donley and Baenen, concluded that Reading Recovery produced lower special education

referral and retention rates than comparison groups, but program students with fewer than 30 lessons and who did not complete the program were more likely to be referred to special education than students who completed Reading Recovery.

Impact on parents/community:

Parent involvement:

At most of the study sites, parents worked with their children in the evenings but did not report being involved in other aspects of the program. Parents are not always able or willing to work with their children in the evenings (Herman & Stringfield, 1997).

Professional Development and Support:

Reading Recovery uses a trainer of trainers model. University professors (trainers of teacher leaders) prepare district-level staff developers (teacher leaders) who in turn train teachers in Reading Recovery teaching techniques. This model ensures that Reading Recovery will have the district and school support that is necessary for successful program implementation.

Teachers participate in a 30-hour workshop before school begins and year-long professional development courses that meet weekly. The ongoing professional development integrates theory and practice and provides intensive interaction with colleagues. Reading Recovery teacher leaders observe he trained teachers in their classroom and provide feedback. Training and program implementation are meant to work in conjunction (Herman & Stringfield, 1997).

Implementation:

Although there is a detailed model for Reading Recovery programs, each site differs slightly. For example, schools might offer longer tutoring sessions, vary the number of weekly sessions and/or the duration of the overall program. While the intensive teacher training and suggested reading materials provide consistency across Reading Recovery programs, some researchers have noted varying degrees of quality.

Although Reading Recovery is a stand-alone program, integrating Reading Recovery strategies with other classroom teaching can benefit students by minimizing conflict in reading strategies (McCollum, 1994). However, Reading Recovery techniques do not seem to transfer naturally to the regular classroom or other teachers (Shanahan and Barr, 1995).

Costs:

Cost estimates for Reading Recovery vary from $2,500 to $10,000 per student. According to one analysis, fees for establishing a Reading Recovery site is approximately $8,000 for the teacher training year. The fees include teacher training by teacher leader, 6 hours of university credit, all professional text, assessment materials and children's books. Continuing contact fees in subsequent years are minimal. The initial cost of a Reading Recovery Training site is ($5,000-$6,000) dependent on the number of districts participating. (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998).

Additional staff are usually needed to provide regular one-on-one tutorials, but some schools use

innovative staffing approaches to cover classes during tutoring sessions. Herman and Stringfield (1997) noted that it might be possible to cut expenses by using small groups rather than tutorials (although outcomes may suffer), by using more direct instruction in phoneme awareness and spelling or by beginning and ending instruction later. Most of the sites visited used Title I funding as their primary support, although few had secured private funding to supplement the program (Herman & Stringfield, 1997). Districts that have several Reading Recovery teachers and schools can meet program needs more easily than districts with more limited program participation.

Although the high cost of Reading Recovery is a concern, many educators and policymakers believe that the investment is worth the potential savings if fewer students are retained, placed in remedial programs or referred to special education.

Considerations:

When implementing Reading Recovery, staff at several sites emphasized the importance of adopting Reading Recovery in its entirety. Some teachers tried variances and reported less successful results (Herman and Stringfield, 1997).

One criticism of Reading Recovery is the program's high cost for the few children served. Typically, Reading Recovery teachers have only four to five students at a time. Some educators believe that the funds required by and devoted to Reading Recovery could be spread more broadly across other programs to meet the needs of more students. Other concerns have arisen as Reading Recovery is implemented. Districts and schools interested in adopting Reading Recovery should be prepared to address issues including: (1) some reading experts believe that the program does not place enough emphasis on phonemic awareness skills; (2) Reading Recovery staff development is time consuming and intensive; (3) some teacher leaders have less time to work directly with students because of the demands on their time to train other teachers; (4) some unintended consequences of the program include staff jealousies over highly concentrated resources, frequent lack of coordination and perhaps unrealistically high expectations for the program (Herman and Stringfield, 1997).

Policy Issues and Questions:
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate reading programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information and assistance would be useful?
Should states promote particular reading programs for districts and schools to use?
How can a reading program's track record be checked and validated?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various reading programs - initially and for the long-term?
How should policymakers weigh the benefits of a reading program versus its cost and required resources?
Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
What state policies can help improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help all students read successfully?

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